

Towns of Sea Girt, Manasquan, and Brielle  
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail  
Adjacent to State Route 71, South of  
State Route 38  
Sea Girt  
Monmouth County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1011

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
TOWNS OF SEA GIRT, MANASQUAN, AND BRIELLE

HABS No. NJ-1011

Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Adjacent to State Route 71, South of State Route 38, Sea Girt, Monmouth County, New Jersey.

Significance: Today, the towns of Sea Girt, Manasquan, and Brielle blend into each other with little differentiation, though they were founded as three distinct communities. The effect of the increased accessibility to the Jersey Shore in southern Monmouth County, made possible by the coming of the railroad in the 1870s-80s, is evident in the development of these three towns. Sea Girt and Brielle were both speculative resort developments, typical of the time, while Manasquan, already a year-round community when the railroad arrived, was transformed by new the tourist market.

History: Sea Girt

The majority of Sea Girt was once cultivated farmland. In 1875, the Sea Girt Improvement Company purchased the land and transformed the 1853 Stockton farm house into the Beach House by adding a new wing. Other hotels soon followed its example and, by 1882 Sea Girt was one of the "most exclusive resorts," particularly attractive to Philadelphians.<sup>1</sup>

In 1885, the community was chosen as the site for a different kind of camp, when the state leased land along Stockton Lake from the Sea Girt Land and Improvement Company.<sup>2</sup> Six years later, it purchased the shore property between the growing resort and Manasquan for the state campgrounds. The training complex was famous for a rifle range "unexcelled" by any other in the United States. The grounds included administration buildings, concrete kitchens, mess halls, and other facilities in 1929. Of special merit were "convenient sidings over which the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Central Railroad of New Jersey, and the New York and Long Branch Railroad operate."<sup>3</sup> Today, units of the National Guardsmen still train in this area, which is fenced off from residential neighborhoods.

Today, representative nineteenth-century hotels such as Park House, constructed in 1878, and Beacon House continue to accommodate guests. Down the street and across from the boardwalk, the Sea Girt lighthouse has been restored to its 1896 condition. The compact building with red trim adds to the Victorian flavor of the primarily residential neighborhood. More than either of the neighboring towns of Manasquan or Brielle, downtown Sea Girt preserves an exclusive atmosphere, with a "domestic aesthetic" emphasizing architectural uniformity through Colonial Revival

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<sup>1</sup> Gustav Kobbe, The New Jersey Coast and Pines (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1977), 56.

<sup>2</sup> New Jersey: Life, Industries and Resources of a Great State (New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce, 1929), 47.

<sup>3</sup> New Jersey: Life, 47.

facades on office buildings and shops alike, with a variety of businesses run out of houses.

#### Manasquan

While the majority of towns along the Northern Jersey Shore grew through the efforts of land associations, Manasquan was already an established year-round community when the railroad arrived. Located at the mouth of the Manasquan River, the settlement profited from both harbor and water power, supplying New Yorkers with softshell crabs and oysters. The village grew around an inn built in 1808 and a tavern constructed a few years later. The second owner of the tavern, Timothy Bloomfield, named the area "Squan Village" in 1825. In the 1850s stagecoaches traveled from Manasquan to Red Bank, another industrial center. Four stage lines ran from Jay Street in New York City, to Squan village and Point Pleasant along "an old sand road."<sup>4</sup> Two decades later, the town proudly advertised warehouses, lumberyards, foundries and, in 1885, its first factory. The suggestion of an industrial past lives on in the W. F. Sherman Millwork Building, and several brick commercial structures downtown.

Nevertheless, no seaside community was exempt from the tourist trade in the late nineteenth century. Around 1872, N. W. Morris purchased thirty acres south of Manasquan and developed a planned residential community called Sea View, with fifty-eight building lots. Considered "a village in itself" only five years later, by 1889 Sea View was a recognized part of the larger settlement. A laudatory newspaper article described the benefits of the territory's "colonization:"

Where there was a desert, there are now splendid avenues which attract pleasure parties as they drive out in the cool of the morning or evening. Where there was wilderness, there are now beautiful lawns, shade trees, houses and gardens, built by a good class of citizens, many whom have become permanent residents of our town.<sup>5</sup>

Today, the Manasquan shore is lined with shingle and clapboard summer bungalows several streets deep. The cottages closest to the sea appear embedded in the dunes; street-level garages face the sidewalk. Rental stores, restaurants, miniature golf, and small-scale amusements contribute to the seasonal feeling. The nineteenth-century life-saving station now occupied by the U.S. Coast Guard preserves part of the area's maritime heritage.

#### Brielle

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<sup>4</sup> Manasquan, New Jersey (Manasquan: Manasquan Chamber of Commerce, 1962), n.p.

<sup>5</sup> Manasquan, New Jersey.

Founded as a speculative development in 1881, Brielle profited from its location on the Manasquan River to become a maritime community. In the 1930s, the riverfront maintained "a large fishing fleet and boat yards."<sup>6</sup> Today the Brielle Basin offers a variety of services for both commercial and recreational fisherman. Signs advertise Bogan's Brielle Basin Deep Sea Fishing Fleet and promote charter boats, such as the PARAMOUNT and JAMAICA, as well as cruises aboard the more ornamental RIVER QUEEN. The Brielle Yacht Club Marina extends along the water for some distance and owns several restaurants overlooking the docks. An old railroad bridge stands abandoned amid the marina's many yachts and other boats. The maritime theme is even present in Brielle residences, several of which are decorated with anchors, sailboats and other nautical images.

Today, Sea Girt, Manasquan, and Brielle blend into each other with little differentiation. Unlike neighboring Spring Lake, with its boundaries of water and wide, manicured lawns, these communities are less obviously contained; their individual commercial districts have expanded along Route 71 to form a continuous artery.

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- Sources: Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. New Jersey: A Guide to its Present and Past. New York: Public Library of Newark and New Jersey Guild Associates, Viking Press, 1939.
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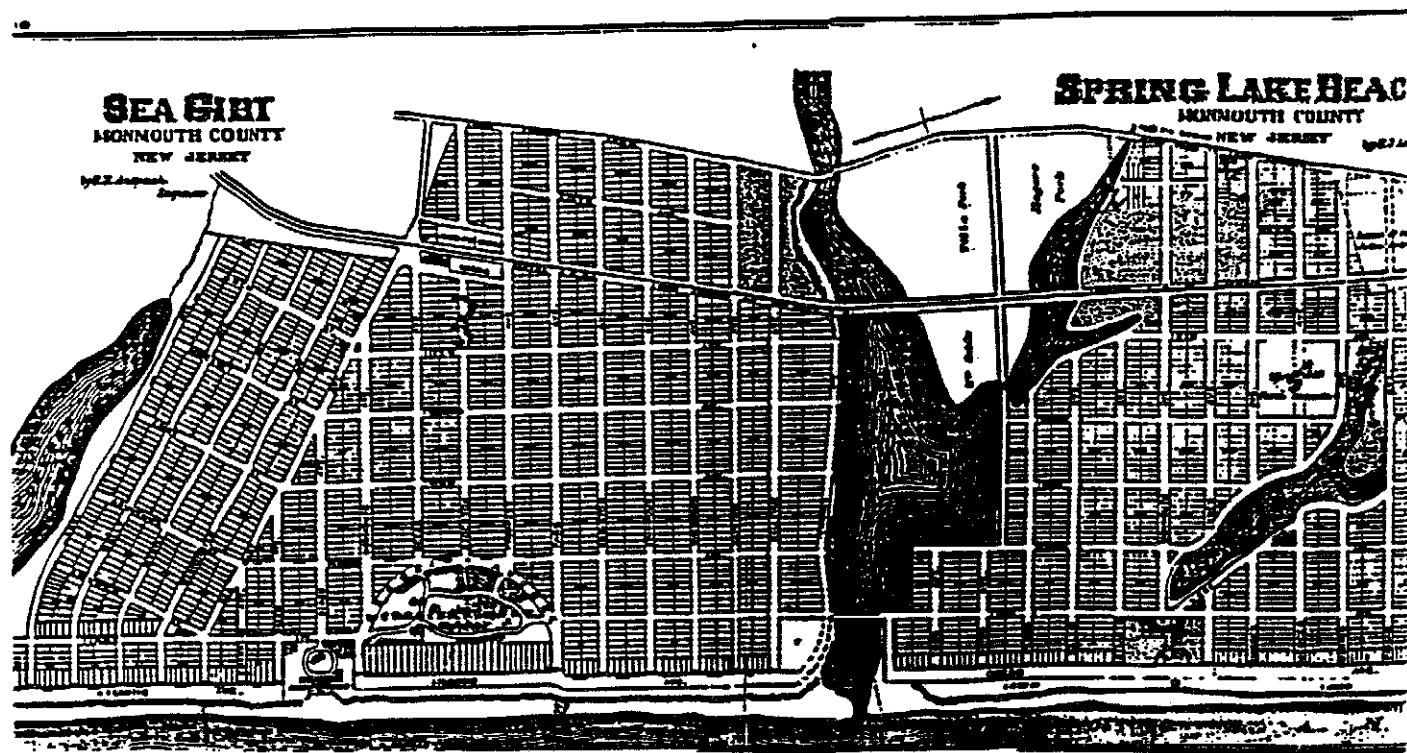
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<sup>6</sup> Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, New Jersey: A Guide to its Present and Past (New York: Public Library of Newark and New Jersey Guild Associates, Viking Press, 1939), 595.

Woolman, H.C. and T.F. Rose. Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast. Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985.

Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatza (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.



H.C. Woolman and T.F. Rose, Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985), 230-1.